

Have You Seen This Man?

I am not a dog person.

This hasn't always been the case, though. As a matter of fact, I used to love them. I grew up telling everyone that I would be a veterinarian one day. Had that been the case, I'd like to think that I wouldn't be in the position I'm in now.

I'm a nervous wreck. As long as I can remember, I've suffered from constant paranoia. If you asked my parents, they'd tell you an entirely different story. According to them, I was calm, cool, and collected as a child. They say it wasn't until I was around 12 when the way I carried myself drastically changed. I don't remember *much* from back then... However, there was a particular scene from my childhood that I'll never be able to push out of my mind. Something (or rather *someone*), that has shadowed me for the rest of my life.



Have you seen this man?

January 1st, 1994

Remember how I said I wasn't a dog person? Well, there's a reason for that. As I said, I'd told my parents that I wanted to be a veterinarian. They supported me. They wanted me to be successful. I take for granted how much they cared for me. They bought me books on animal anatomy. They took me to zoos. They bought me various VHS documentaries on animals. They tried their best to raise me into the adult that I wanted to be. The adult that my parents could be proud of.

My birthday was in November. I was turning twelve. My previous attempts of asking my

parents for a pet had always ended in an uneventful manner. They would always say I wasn't old enough, that I wasn't prepared for the responsibility of looking after a living, breathing animal. I was set to prove them wrong. This year, I was fucking **twelve**. I'd been reading up on all of those animal books, and this year I knew I was ready. Once again, I told my parents that I wanted an animal this year. Their reaction was different this time. My father gave me a single, "Maybe."

And with that, I knew what I'd be getting for my birthday this year.

It was no surprise when I woke up the day of my birthday to a small puppy licking my face. I was thrilled. There my parents were standing at my bedroom door smiling warmly. They wished me a happy birthday, and gave me a speech about how I needed to treat the dog the way I would any other living being. They provided me with dog food, bowls, and a leash. In that moment, I was the happiest I'd ever been in my life. That dog was my best friend.

The time I spent with the dog was great. I was an only child. Home-schooled. I was never really able to have interaction with people my age, not that I'd have a problem with doing so. My dog, who I'd named *Theo*, had steadily grown a bond with me over the course of a month. We bonded the way any other kid would with his dog. We went on walks, we played together, I bathed him, fed him, and overall trying to raise him the best I could, as my parents had done for me. Needless to say, my parents were impressed. Their opinion of me soon changed.

It was January 1st, the beginning of a new year, and a new beginning for *me*. I woke up at around 10:00am, a late start for me, I never actually made it to midnight on New Years before. I felt like absolute *shit*. I was greeted in the kitchen by my mother, who had provided a delicious breakfast. My mother's cooking was stuff of legend. As I sat at the dining room table to eat breakfast, Theo greeted me from under the table and sat down at my feet. I slipped him a piece of bacon. He was delighted.

My breakfast was cut short. One of my chores was to get the mail every day. As soon as I heard the familiar sound of the mail truck, I shot up out of my chair. One of my animal documentaries taught me about Ivan Pavlov and his dogs. Funny how I didn't know I was being conditioned to react a certain way to the sound of that truck. I was still tired from last night. I fumbled toward the front door. I wasn't paying much attention. As soon as I opened the door, Theo took off as fast as he could. I couldn't process what just happened. He had never done that before. I collected my thoughts, and decided to go after him. I grabbed my jacket from the coat rack and ran outside. As soon as I stepped foot on my porch, I froze. Theo hadn't gotten far. He hadn't even left the front yard. The yard's exit was blocked by a man.



Another picture of This Man.

This was the first time I saw '**him**'.

The man looked straight at me. He didn't blink. I didn't know what to do or how to feel. At first I was grateful. He was the only thing standing between Theo and the rest of the world. He said nothing. Theo was looking up at him. He wagged his tail. He panted. It was as if the man didn't notice the dog was there. He just kept staring. I wanted to say something, I wanted to *thank* him. The way he was looking at me was as if he was expecting me to say something. I couldn't bring myself to. Without averting his gaze, he kneeled down and picked up Theo by the scruff of his neck. Theo whined. I wanted to tell him to put down my dog, but again, I couldn't. I simply couldn't think of appropriate words. My mind was all in a jumble. I couldn't move, and I couldn't think straight. All I could do was watch.

The man reached into his pocket, pulled out a knife, and cut the dog's throat in one quick motion. Blood spilled onto the snow-covered ground. He held the dog in the air for a few seconds, letting Theo's blood form a puddle underneath him. The man then simply let go. Theo fell with a light crunch onto the reddened snow. Again, the man's gaze did not leave mine. He dropped the knife to the ground, and merely walked away. It wasn't until he was completely out of sight when I could move again. I made my way over to Theo's garbling corpse, and stood over him. I wanted to cry, but couldn't shed a single tear.

My mother emerged from the house, surely wondering why getting the mail was taking so long. I don't blame her for screaming. She saw me standing over the mangled corpse of Theo, knife on the ground. It didn't take a genius to put two-and-two together. The scene described itself.

Aftermath of the First Occurrence

In the following months, my parents had forced me into seeing a psychiatrist. When asked why I killed Theo, I tried to tell him that it wasn't me. I tried my best to tell him about the man. I could tell he wasn't buying it.

"*All right,*" said the therapist with a smug tone. "*Tell me what this man looked like.*"

That's when I realized, I couldn't describe him. It's not that I didn't remember his face. It's just... he was so *generic* I wouldn't be able to describe him without describing millions of other people in the world. His face was so *forgettable*. I know I stared at the man for a good five minutes. One would assume I would be able to remember the face of a man who had killed my dog without breaking eye contact with me. It was like I knew what he looked like, but my brain couldn't translate his appearance into words.

I didn't answer the therapist's question. I simply slumped into my chair. Throughout my entire life, this man has popped up in multiple occasions. I may go into further detail in the future, but all I can say for now is that he definitely *exists*. I may seem crazy, but I know what I saw that day. I *always* see him. Whether he's among a crowd while watching the news, or in my dreams. He's real, and he's always watching.